Sweet Tooth

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By

Joseph Gregory Anderson

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Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5A2
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Sweet Tooth

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"Oh, you're hurting me, you're hurting me," cried a little voice…. "You're a naughty boy."

Billy looked around. There on the edge of his blanket stood the tiniest little fairy that ever eye did see. "Who are you and what do you want?" asked Billy, very much afraid. "I am Queen of the Fairies. I have one of my helpers to watch over you day and night. She is a Health Fairy. As I was passing your window, I heard my little helper crying."

Way down from under the bed clothes came a thin, weak voice, "Help me. I am so sick." Down from the edge of the blanket scampered the Fairy, "I'll see what's the matter."

Billy waited anxiously and finally the Fairy appeared again. "Oh Billy, you made her sick… You gave her too much candy and she's been crying the whole night." (Wells, 146-147)

Figure 1. Joseph Anderson, *Sweet Tooth* exhibition installation view, left to right, *Garden*, *Large Sweet Tooth*, and *Large Child #2.*

Naughty Girls & Naughty Boys

Sweet Tooth is an exploration of childhood culture as it exists in an adult world. I am interested in the power dynamics resulting from the cohabitation of youth and adults, and the manner in which adults impose their knowledge, faith, and morals upon children. Through the watercolour paintings and textile sculptures in *Sweet Tooth*, I investigate nostalgia, childhood playthings and children's literature, especially cautionary tales and religious texts for children. These morality tales are a product of Victorian-era theories of youth education and child rearing. While much has changed in the past 100 years, the impact of this era can still be felt, especially in conservative religious cultures such as that which informed my own youth. The children's stories produced during this particular time use a mixture of scare-tactics and theological themes to convey their message. In Victorian times, there was an apprehension about failing the

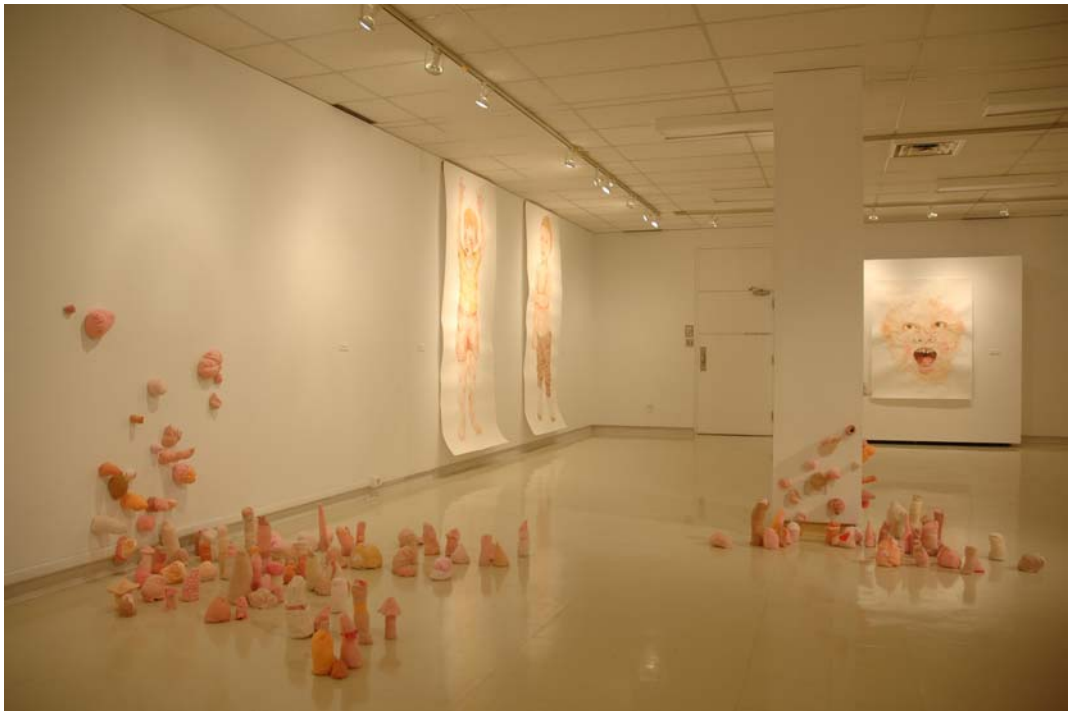

Figure 2. Joseph Anderson, *Sweet Tooth* exhibition installation view, left to right, *Garden*, *Large Child #4*, *Large Child #3,* and *Large Sweet Tooth*.

intellectual, physical, and spiritual needs of children. This was compensated for with well-intentioned, but peculiar, attempts to frighten youngsters into strict obedience. The painting style in my exhibition, and my use of the watercolour medium, recalls the colourful imagery found in Victorian-era books for children. The textiles in my sculptural works relate to treasured childhood toys. My paintings and sculptures reference the human bodies of both children and adults and employ dramatic shifts in scale. Conceptually, the artwork challenges didactic lessons, but, nevertheless, the children in the paintings appear to crave approval from authority figures. The illustrations of bodies in *Sweet Tooth* defiantly reveal their imperfections and limitations, but also display a playful humour and desire for worldly delights. The conceptual themes of my art stem from sentimental and romantic views of childhood and my desire is to dissect and expose the actual struggles children endured in past generations, and continue to experience today. These themes recall the Christian teachings during my formative years and relate to adult recollections of youthful guilt and punishment. After describing the conceptual territory that has informed my artwork, I will discuss my choice of medium and how I understand the impact of my art within a contemporary context. Finally, I will explain how my thematic and media choices inform the specific paintings and sculptures in my exhibition.

The story, which introduced this paper, is excerpted from *Health Stories and Practice,* an elementary hygiene manual published in 1937. Young Billy's sleep is interrupted by cries of pain, followed by the visitation and subsequent admonition from an annoyed fairy. While much tamer than most cautionary tales, this story is especially hurtful since Billy's misdeed causes another's suffering. His humiliation at being caught with poor eating habits is heightened through his feelings of guilt. Just as parables were used to teach Bible principles

in Christian religious education, Billy's health lesson is ripe with morality. Since the young are dependent on adults for care, they must submit to the older generation's rules even if the method of instruction is through fear or coercion.

Bedtime Stories

The mid-nineteenth century saw a renewed interest in the proper education of children, and an increase in the publication of moral stories (Bratton 63). British philosopher, Herbert Spencer, positioned the tutelage and welfare of children above all other state institutions (Berry 1-2). Spencer's contemporary, W. E. Forster (a philanthropist and Member of Parliament), introduced the Elementary Education Act of 1870, which mandated education for all school-age children, regardless of class. Forster concurred with Spencer's assumptions that child ignorance was sure to invite criminal behaviour and misery into the community, if not the entire country (Berry 162-163). There was a genuine fear that neglected children would lead to society's imminent downfall. In reaction to this anxiety, strict attitudes about genteel behaviour, clean thoughts and successful living crept into children's stories as part of the narrative (Bratton 103). The inexperience of children prompted greater authority from adults who fretted over both the internal and external well-being of sons and daughters (Berry 16). The Victorian child's scholastic lessons were infused with Christian religious instruction. They were constantly reminded of their weak morality, "*sinfulness and shortcomings*" (Bratton 111). Not surprisingly, adult literature produced during this time often featured child victims. Charles Dickens, the Brontë sisters, and, to some extent, Lewis Carroll, required their young characters to bear cruel torments by unscrupulousness adults (Berry 2).

Naturally, the grave concern for desolate or uneducated children prompted the publication of austere, instructional books in the form of cautionary tales. The cautionary tale is a literary style which gained popularity in nineteenth-century United Kingdom and America. Cautionary tales generally follow a set pattern. First, a parent or other authority figure forbids a taboo activity. The protagonist, usually a child, rejects the warnings and engages in the activity. Finally, the child's disobedience is underscored through an unfortunate outcome. His or her fate is always a serious injury or death, and is described in gory detail. Cautionary tales are often without any real character development or even an engaging plot, but are simply an excuse to impart a heavy-handed moral. There is no intended entertainment value in a cautionary tale, as its purpose is to frighten and coerce proper behavior by showing the tragic consequences of misbehavior (Chalou 43).

Perhaps the best known of this genre is Dr. Heinrich Hoffmann's 1844 book *Struwwelpeter* (often translated from the German as *Slovenly Peter*, or *Shock Headed Peter). Struwwelpeter* is a collection of short stories, accompanied by graphic illustrations, which threaten children with a violent demise if they do not heed the warnings and lectures of adults. While some argue today that Dr. Hoffmann's intent was to amuse rather than to frighten youngsters, there is an unquestionable sadistic quality to *Struwwelpeter*'s delight in the mutilations and deaths suffered by disobedient children (Chalou 2). Consider the story of Conrad, "*The Little Suck-a-Thumb*," who is chastised for his habit and then abused by a scissor-wielding stranger who snips off the offending digits.

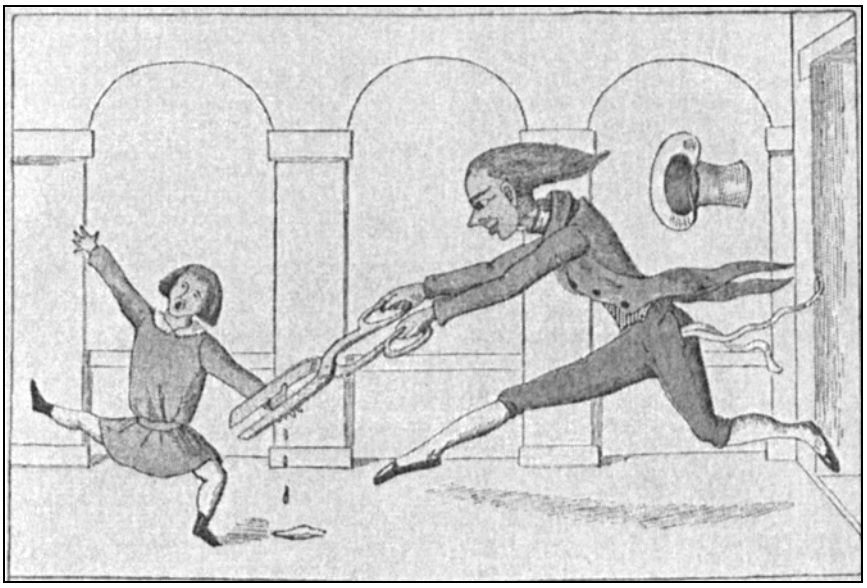

Figure 3. "*The Story of the Little Suck-a-Thumb*" from the *English Struwwelpeter*, 60th Edition (1917).

When we consider that Dr. Hoffmann's original target audience was his three-year-old son, an age when children have little ability to separate fantasy from reality, *Struwwelpeter* seems absurdly frightening and didactic (Chalou 25-28). The macabre punishments in *Struwwelpeter* are shocking, quick and irreversible. However, the reader must remember that each punishment is a direct result of misbehaviour. The moral is clear: always obey (Chalou 41).While a modern parent would most likely be reluctant to present their toddler with such a violent story, children of past generations were seen differently than they are today, and thought to require more sturdy methods of instruction. The young were thought to be small versions of adults, who momentarily lacked enlightenment and power (Berry 4). With the proper education, children were expected to abandon innocence and ignorance, and step confidently into adulthood. The education of the Victorian boy was devised to promote independence and "manliness" (Bratton 147), and the Victorian girl, who was cautiously being allowed into the previously male-dominated realm of learning, was taught to acquire gender-

specific aspirations and expected to shoulder her societal role as wife and mother (Bratton 148).

The cautionary tale certainly has strong connections to Sunday school lessons, and while books like *Struwwelpeter* are not inherently "religious," they still remind children that their everyday decisions, if not in tune with religious dogma, lead to fateful consequences. Beliefs that children were ungodly and naturally sinful were preached for generations prior to *Struwwelpeter*, so it is not surprising that nineteenth-century readers were fascinated with the vicious, but justified casualties of Dr. Hoffmann's naughty characters. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, few books were published for children aside from those with religious themes. While cautionary tales warned of bodily harm, godly books additionally preyed upon the emotions. They relied heavily on ecclesiastical fear to inform children of their unclean state. The writers of the godly books assumed that once the child's spirit was humbled, they were able to accept their literary lessons (Chalou 17). Religious tracts posed frightful questions about the worthiness of the soul in publications, such as the *Child's Companion* (first produced in 1824), which morbidly explained to children that "*you may not live to the end of the year*" (Bratton 40).

Good Girls & Good Boys

While I don't remember hearing specific cautionary tales as a child, I did grow up in a strict Mormon household and heeded the advisory preaching of my parents and church leaders. My family's devotion to our faith, and my continuous involvement in church activities, coloured many of my earliest memories. As I'm sure is expected of children in most Christian churches, an ideal Mormon child is both reverent and obedient. As a youngster, I felt a sense

of pride in striving to be both. I recall sitting in church with arms folded gently across my chest to display not only a sign of piety to an omnipresent Being, but also obedience to my parents and teachers. I would often remain silent, even when I knew the answers in Sunday school, to secretly prove that I could be reverent. It wasn't until later in life that I realized the connection between the Biblical stories of my youth, and the themes of punishment, taboo, and children's culture within my practice as an artist. I'm not suggesting that religion is flawed or unnecessary, nor am I suggesting that my own childhood was unpleasant, but I'm intrigued by the sometimes troubling way religious beliefs are thrust onto the lives of children. These beliefs were often disguised through instructive literature and the cautionary tale is a prime example of this teaching approach.

My childhood experiences with didactic Christian teachings were subtle, but extremely effective. Mormonism preaches an eternal existence, both before and after earthly life, and requires baptism at the age of eight: "The Age of Accountability." After baptism, every action is supposedly seen and remembered by a Heavenly Father who patiently waits to judge misdeeds upon one's demise. The emphasis on family unity is heightened by the Mormon doctrine of "Eternal Families:" the belief that a righteous family remains connected after death. Despite my best efforts, I was plagued by an indescribable sensation of unworthiness, which, much later, was revealed to be homosexuality. I was also taught, at an early age, the seriousness of sexual sin, which "*stand[s], in its enormity, next to murder*" (Ludlow 265). My childhood years were spent in persistent fear that I would be snatched away from my family once my secret was discovered. The threat of excommunication became unbearable and I prayed fervently to be accepted, and forgiven. It was not until much later that I was able to disregard these early lessons. My practice as an artist alludes to my gay

identity through material, symbolism and fabricated substitutes for the body. My sculptural works in *Sweet Tooth* are sewn with pink textiles, and covered with multiple phalluses which suggest erotic possibilities to the viewer. I capitalize on the stereotyped association of femininity and "gay camp" with textiles and sewing by appropriating these materials and techniques. Essentially, the large-scale paintings of children in *Sweet Tooth* are stand-ins for myself and other viewers who empathize with the painted image's physical, if not internal, separation from peers. My personal disconnection from other Mormons is based on my sexual orientation, my questioning of Church doctrine, and my somewhat unconventional career choice.

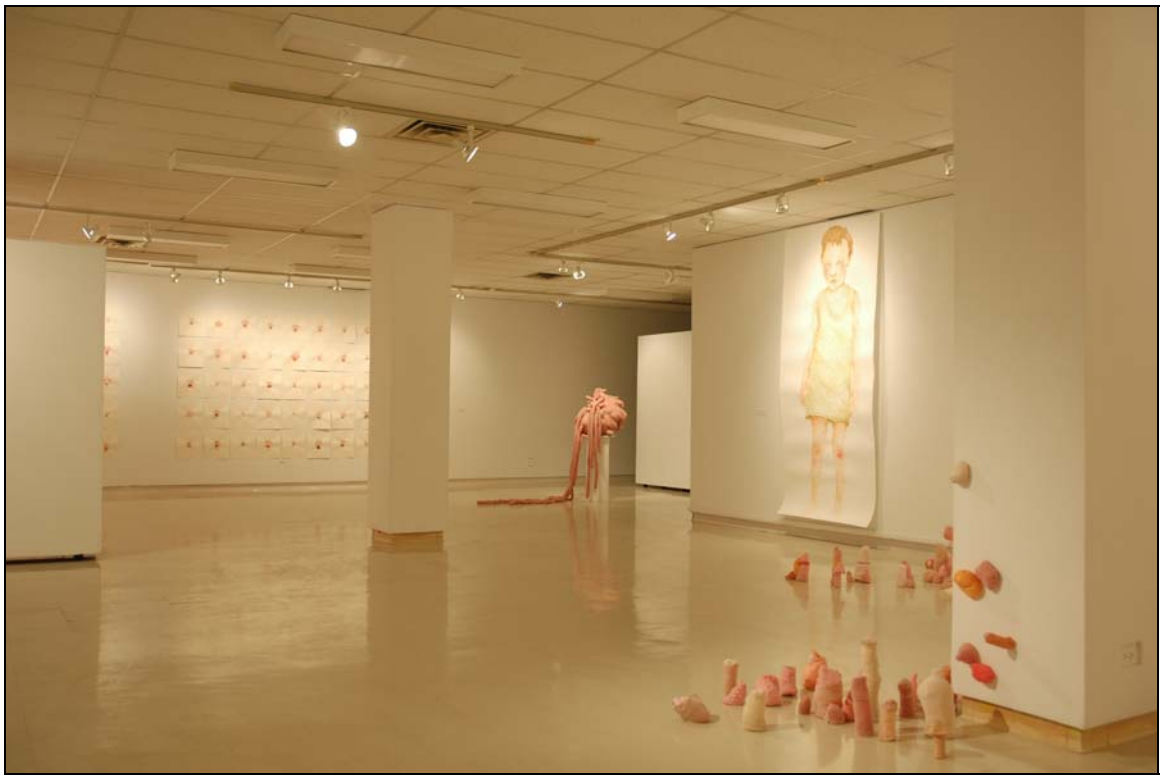

Figure 4. Joseph Anderson, *Sweet Tooth* exhibition installation view, left to right, *Choir*, *Playmate*, *Large Child #1*, and detail of *Garden.*

Wash

The illustrations in instructional books for children are often recalled into adulthood just as much, or even more so, than the text. A traditional medium of Victorian, 19th century illustration is watercolour painting, since it evokes the gentility and innocence adults thought were required for the eyes of children. There is a tradition of speaking of watercolour's delicacy, softness, and transparency (Koschatzky 7). This medium is sometimes associated with naiveté and femininity and is often used to produce a study for a larger, more complete painting in a different medium. It is also a favourite among so-called "Sunday painters." As an artistic medium, watercolour has a long tradition of being used in historical, realistic painting. Artists like J. M. W. Turner, and John Constable brought a maturity to watercolours in the early nineteenth century and created the foundation of British landscape painting (Koschatzky 56).

My desire is to bring watercolour into the fine art milieu for subject matter other than landscapes, and reconsider the technique and style for which it is known. Watercolour paintings are often small and delicately hued which make them a passive younger sibling to the fiery colours of oil or acrylic paints. My goal during my studies has been to reinterpret watercolour as a bold medium by increasing the size of the paintings while trying to retain the gentle washes for which the medium is recognized. While I appreciate watercolour's immediacy and luminosity, I am primarily interested in its connection to the style and medium of children's book illustration. Watercolour is an ideal choice for illustration as is can be both a painting and a drawing tool. This legible style became a hallmark of my earliest paintings, which used storybook narrative and simplified rendering. I exploit watercolour's properties of formal cleanliness and

associations with nostalgia to accent the personal connection with memories of bedtime stories and Christian training.

During my undergraduate studies at the University of Lethbridge, I painted primarily with acrylic paints, while my extracurricular paintings were with watercolours. I initially had doubts that watercolours could be considered a "serious" medium in a post-secondary art class, but, during my final year, I was determined to introduce them into my university art classes. Watercolours seem to prompt hesitant reactions from fellow-artists who ponder the medium's relevancy in the contemporary art world, and I was met with curious stares from instructors and classmates upon hearing my intentions. My first breakthrough was realizing I could extract the paintings out of the "framed rectangle" by cutting the images out of the paper and attaching them in groups on the wall, or onto free-standing supports and objects. As cut-out objects, the paintings became more tangible and appeared to interact with their environment by sharing the same space as the viewer. There was a vulnerable quality to the cut-outs which made the paintings appear as fragile and disposable as paper dolls (Oakes 3). I began to appropriate images from children's books, health manuals and art historical references. I attempted to reproduce the techniques other artists and illustrators used to make comparisons and contrasts between the juxtaposed images. While the collective group of paintings covered a larger area in the gallery space, the individual pieces remained somewhat small, perhaps relating to their literary source. I carried these skills into my graduate studies, but soon found the small size limiting and slowly increased the scale of my works.

Figure 5. Raymond Pettibon, *Untitled (Such an employment)*, 1996, ink on paper.

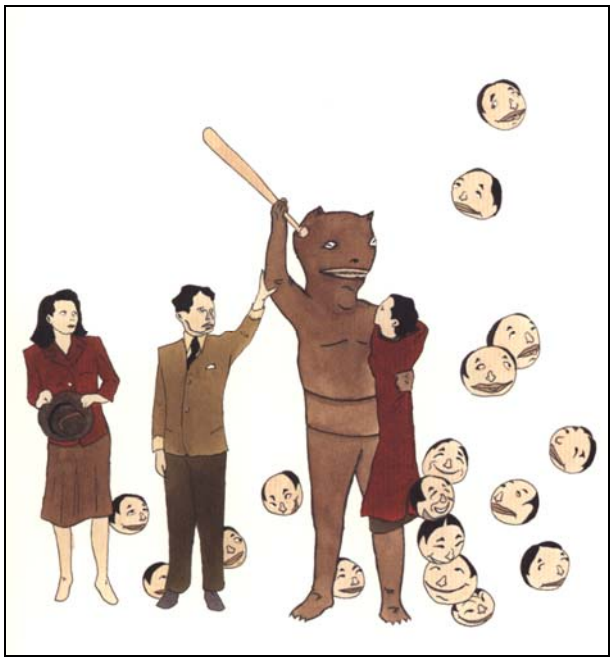

Figure 6. Marcel Dzama, *Untitled*, 2005, ink and watercolour on paper.

I soon discovered other contemporary artists interested in the graphic style of water-based media, such as ink and watercolour. Many of these artists were engaged in promoting water-based media, not as a painting material, but as a drawing tool. American artist, Raymond Pettibon, uses text-based ink drawings to critique popular culture, newspaper comics, and Americana. In his use of bold lines and automatic writing, his work refers to pop art, illustrations, and cartoons. These allusions could be seen as so-called "low art" or cheaply-made kitsch, much like the pictures in some children's books (Storr 61). Pettibon also makes uncomfortable appropriations of childhood icons, such as claymation film-maker Art Clokey's endearing television star *Gumby*, who, along with his shapeless girlfriend *Goo*, morphs into erotic, angry shapes and questions our understanding of body identification (Storr 50). My interest, and discomfort, in witnessing the corruption of cherished characters is probably rooted in a desire to retain the blind trust I felt as a child. Winnipeg-born artist, Marcel Dzama,

similarly exploits the illustrative tone of children's books. His subdued calibre of line and soft colour palette is betrayed by surreal, yet playful, violence, and his doodled figures participate in odd rituals which baffle, and entice, the viewer. Preconceived ideas of comic book heroes, villains, alliances, and feuds are twisted in hallucinatory narratives, and Dzama uses personal symbols and familiar caricatures to fabricate false memories of childhood stories (Tougaw 23).

Figure 7. Joseph Anderson, *Eight Boys Wrestle an Octopus*, 2007, watercolour on paper, 38"x 100".

My first significantly large scale watercolour painting produced during my MFA program, *Eight Boys Wrestle an Octopus*, uses both imagery and narrative to suggest a thrilling colour plate in a storybook. Eight boys and young men are caught in the twisting tentacles of an enormous sea beast and struggle in a watery landscape. The overwhelming size of the cephalopod, and the apparent abysmal depths of the indigo water, threaten to engulf the boys completely. Their agitated poses recall the *Laocoön Group*, the famous Hellenistic statue which depicts a beleaguered trio of father and sons in the crushing embrace of serpents. The carnal quality of the *Laocoön* reptiles draped over muscled flesh is inescapable, but the pained expressions of the figures are understandable and troubling.

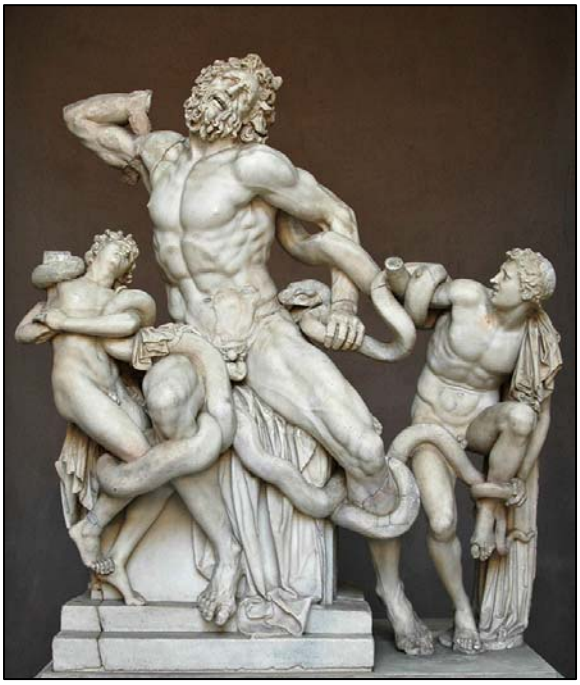

Figure 8. *The Laocoön Group*, 1st century A.D.

In *Eight Boys Wrestle an Octopus*, I was careful to leave the boy's expressions ambiguous, leaving the viewer to decide how each character is engaged within the story. The boys individually indicate their level of participation in this animal/human embrace with their faces and actions suggesting terror, boredom, pain, arousal, or curiosity. As in the *Laocoön Group*, my painted figures exhibit a sensual identification with the long, phallic arms of the victimizer (Oakes 3). *Eight Boys Wrestle an Octopus* also suggests the final moments of a cautionary tale. These young swimmers have been warned against their excursion, and are paying a deadly price for their mistake. While *Eight Boys Wrestle an Octopus* is not included in my MFA exhibition, I feel it has relevant connections to *Sweet Tooth*'s themes of storytelling, childhood, and body awareness.

Playmates

In the painting, *Large Sweet Tooth,* I show a direct outcome to a child's disobedience. The unfortunate child in *Large Sweet Tooth* has disregarded proper oral hygiene and stretches a sickly mouth to showcase a set of rotting teeth and gums. The title itself suggests the cause of this child's troubles. The child's flesh bears spots of illness which give further evidence of neglect to personal hygiene.

Figure 9. Joseph Anderson, *Large Sweet Tooth*, 2008, watercolour on paper, 63″ x 50″.

Children are often captured in art with glowing beauty which reinforces a sense of their innocence. *Large Sweet Tooth* betrays that expectation and shows the child as spoilt and corruptible. *Large Sweet Tooth* exploits the unexpected qualities of watercolour and uses the medium to depict the ongoing transformation of skin by mishaps, maturation, and genetics. My interest in including the acne, blemishes, moles and scars that mar the flesh is enhanced by the tendency of watercolour to pool and stain. The large scale of my painting also defies conventions of miniature associated with the medium. The child's face expands to the size of her body, and she becomes intimidating, reversing the expected power relationship of adult to child.

Figure 10. Joseph Anderson, *Large Child #4* and *#3*, both watercolour on paper, 114″ x 50″ each.

Figure 11. Joseph Anderson, *Large Child #1* (detail).

Figure 12. Joseph Anderson, *Large Child #2.*

Figure 13. Joseph Anderson, *Large Child #2,* watercolour on paper, 114" x 50".

In the *Large Child* series, androgynous children reverse the understood order of authority by towering over the viewer. Their hesitant, but defiant stares contest parental rule and display their afflictions, such as missing fingers, measles, and obesity, with guarded assurance. The allusion to Lewis Carroll's *Wonderland* books becomes obvious when we recall how Carroll's heroine Alice, after being shrunk to the size of a mouse, grows so quickly in the white rabbit's house that "*she found her head pressing against the ceiling, and had to stoop to save her neck from being broken*" (Carroll 43). The *Large Child* paintings also allude to Carroll's melancholy photographic portraits of young waifs and costumed girls.

The book, *Carroll: Photos and Letters of Lewis Carroll to his Child Friends,* describe the demeanour of Carroll's child subjects:

> *All the writer's young models seem to be afraid of the future and of the world of grown-ups. They seems to share his own fear and regrets at having to leave childhood behind and to grow and grow, as though they also were experiencing Alice's anguish and terror in "Alice in Wonderland," which might as easily have been called "Alice in Nightmareland."* (Almansi 197)

Figure 14. Lewis Carroll, circa 1875, albumen print, Gernshein Collection, University of Texas.

The children in the *Large Child* paintings show an apprehension, not only about the adult-governed environment in which they live, but the transformation of their own bodies. While there are many theories about Carroll's *Wonderland*, I've always felt that Alice's constant, and dramatic bodily changes were symbols of adolescent development, and her surreal travels (beginning with the birth-like images of squeezing through a rabbit hole or tumbling through a mirror) were Alice's development from pubescence into womanhood. In his book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll's harassed heroine describes her confusion about her bodily changes to the caterpillar who asks her identity:

I - I hardly know, Sir, just at present – at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then. (Carroll 53)

Figure 15. Joseph Anderson, *Choir* (installation view), 2008, watercolour and graphite on paper, 100 pieces.

The drawing installation, *Choir,* incorporates the misgivings of the *Large Child* paintings and the warnings of *Large Sweet Tooth*. The one hundred faces that fill the gallery wall may express a variety of emotions, but they all similarly expose an open mouth. If they were singing, or shouting, or screaming, the sound in the enclosed space would be deafening. Half of the mouths are directed at the viewer, while the other half have ambiguously upturned faces which appear to be reclining in a dentist's chair, or crying towards heaven, or waiting in anticipation for an unseen activity or item above them. Whether they are

Figure 16. Joseph Anderson, *Choir* (detail), 2008, watercolour and graphite on paper, 17″ x 14″ each.

anticipating an oral inspection or repelling an advancing threat, *Choir* divides its members into those that accept reprimand, and those who reprove the cautionary warnings. The images of the faces appear to beg for assurance and linger patiently for further instruction. With their lack of identifiers, such as clothing and hair, the faces become both genderless and ageless. Like the child in *Large Sweet Tooth*, these mouths must also endure the scrutiny of the viewer, but their anonymity and presence as a group gives less dominion to the inspector. The one hundred faces, while insignificant and small individually, form a large-scale wall of defence in their conjoined state.

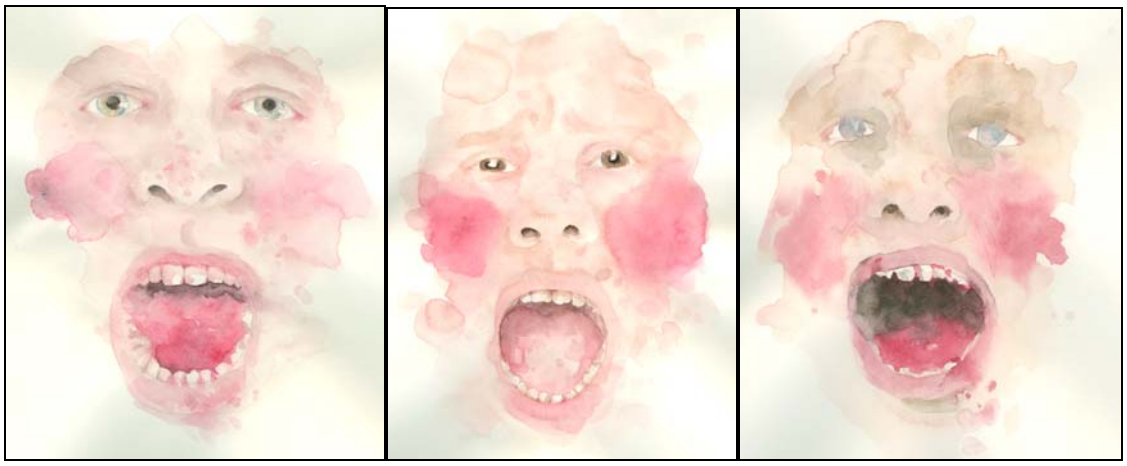

Figure 17. Joseph Anderson, *Choir* (detail), 2008, watercolour and graphite on paper, 17″x 14″ each.

In *Choir*, as in the large-scale paintings of individual children, my painting technique consists of light, loose washes which dissolve the facial and bodily features like melted ice cream. The translucency of the painted skin allows the viewer to visually enter the intimate recesses of the body. A similar process of using painted and drawn washes of colour is used by Canadian artist, Ed Pien, known for his drawings of mutated figures, who describes this as a way to "*open the body up. It's very visceral, [and] messy*" (Enright 16).

Playthings

I am primarily a painter, but during graduate school I took a course that focused on hand-built ceramics. Through this process, I became intrigued with sculptural forms and the effects of materiality upon the viewer. My initial exploration grew out of a project that required an integration of clay and a found object. I crafted a bulbous, hollow, lump of clay and punctured it with several holes and gashes. Using cut-up pieces of small, second-hand, stuffed toys, I randomly filled the holes with legs, ears, noses, tails and paws. While my original idea was to create the impression that creatures were crawling in or out

of caves on a smooth hillside, the response from my fellow classmates was different. They called it, "The Snowman," and attributed movement and emotion to something I initially thought was inanimate. The class suggested it could be a roaming snowball which picked up unlucky skiers as it rolled down snowy hills, or a menacing monster which devoured unsuspecting children and animals, leaving only a dangling piece of clothing as proof of its consumption. Through this project, I found I could explore connections to childhood play and figurative prototypes like dolls, action figures, and other substitutes for the body in new ways by using three-dimensional forms and materials.

Figure 18. Joseph Anderson, *Snowman*, 2007, hand-built ceramic and found objects, 5" x 5" x 7"

Figure 19. Joseph Anderson, *Parent*, 2007, second-hand fabric, approx. 36" x 22" x 25".

The possible animation of this strange form was an unexpected interpretation for me and prompted a desire to recreate a larger version. Since ceramics seemed like an impractical choice for a large-scale object, I chose fabric as a more workable solution. Despite some limited skill at the sewing machine, I pieced together a few patchwork "dolls" from an assortment of second-hand

fabrics. These abstract dolls were a surreal hybrid of multiple limbs, tentacles, openings, appendages, tails, and phalluses. I also added intricate clusters of sparkling beads and decorative thread, adornments that were both pretty and pathetic, while also resembling bruises, wounds, or sores.

In my second attempt, I tried to produce a stronger connection to the body and made my forms less toy-like. I chose fabrics which emphasized sensuous texture and "fleshy" colour, worn bath towels, peach coloured silk, red felt, and stained pink cotton. While I could have purchased new textiles, I enjoyed knowing that my second-hand fabrics already held a history of bodily contact as they had previously been pressed onto and rubbed against the bodies of strangers. This history of flesh/textile contact creates a tactile appeal to the dolls that repeatedly entices viewers to pick them up in order to explore and fondle the orifices and protrusions on their soft "skin." This interaction with the sculptural dolls may have to do with their crude construction and well-used appearance. People seemed very comfortable holding them, much like one would hold a beloved teddy bear or blanket.

American artist Louise Bourgeois' interest in textiles has been an inspiration to me. Her sculpture, *Pierre*, (1998) is stitched together with what appear to be bandages. The swatches of fabric skin are held

Figure 20. Louise Bourgeois, *Pierre*, 1998, fabric, 8" x 5" x 5".

together with exposed seams and dangling threads, perhaps mimicking flayed or burnt flesh. A single ear hangs precariously off the swollen head, while slight dimples represent eyes and nostrils. The gaping mouth could be any number of orifices. *Pierre* is simultaneously recognizable and abstracted.

American artist, Mike Kelley, has also prompted my interest in using fabric and children's cast-offs, and in exploring how the appropriation of discarded objects transforms the gallery space. Kelley collects and assembles groups of second-hand (often hand-crafted) children's toys. His dolls are sometimes exhibited as they are found, or sewn together in an orgiastic embrace. His sculptural creations do not disguise that the toys have been "*tossed, thrown, kicked and played with*." (Welchman 67). One can imagine a baby drooling over a stuffed bunny rabbit, or children dragging a faithful, furry companion over a dusty sidewalk. As the expression goes, these toys have been *well-loved*. By introducing craft and a store-bought aesthetic into the gallery environment, Kelley insists that thrift-store "junk" can have value in spite of its cheap construction (Welchman 64).

Figure 21. Mike Kelley, *Frankenstein*, 1989, sewn stuffed animals and mixed media, 78" long.

I felt my sculptures also made a connection with Kelley's curatorial project, *The Uncanny* (2004). In this exhibition of historic and contemporary figurative sculpture, Kelley worked with the Freudian concept of feeling

simultaneous attraction and repulsion to a specific object. While my sculptures are clearly not direct imitations of life, they do relate to childhood activities where inanimate toys evolve into active characters during playtime. Kelley agrees that when we animate a lifeless object, it is generated out of the imagination and "*is intimately connected in some secret manner to your life*" (Kelley 26). This leaves the plaything's owner with an uncomfortable set of questions: if my plaything were to really come alive, would it want to play, or would it harm me, and would I be in control, or would I be overpowered? The idea of a living plaything is, of course, preposterous. However, with these ideas in mind, my sculptures' expressionless forms may appear both animate and lifeless, and the larger textile piece could evoke either a welcoming invitation or a sense of menace. In the end, the viewer adds the spark of life.

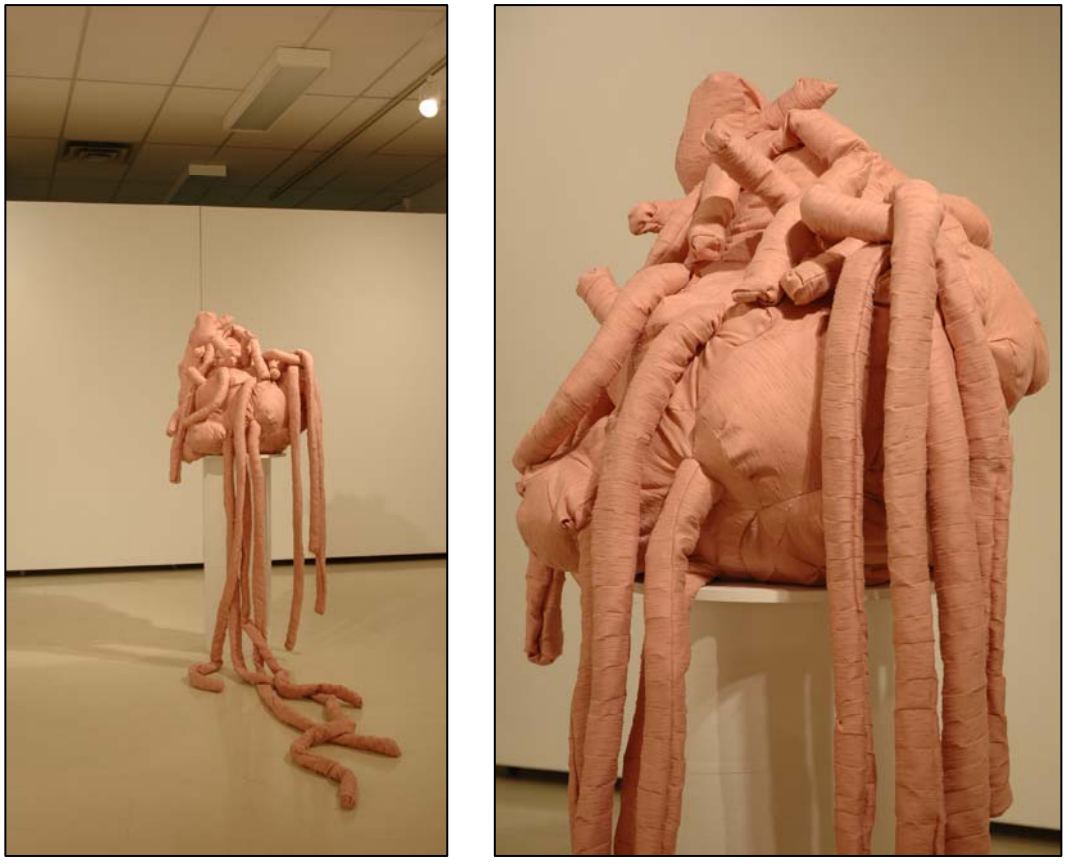

Figure 22. Joseph Anderson, *Playmate* (installation view and detail), 2008, second-hand fabric.

Scale can add to this sense of welcome or menace. A sculpture's size affects how it is perceived by the viewer. If the sculpture is larger than the viewer, it appears more powerful and establishes a strong physical presence within the gallery. Kelley uses this strategy deliberately and writes that, conversely:

> *Small figurative objects invite the viewer to project onto them. For a young child, a stuffed animal is not simply a model of some agreeable object, a friendly animal or an object to weave fantasies around like a doll. It is primarily a tactile object associated with physical pleasure. It is very present.* (Kelley 27).

Figure 23. Joseph Anderson, *Garden* (installation view), 2008, second-hand fabric, 165 pieces, dim. variable.

In my textile sculptures, I similarly challenge the viewer's sense of scale and authority. The sculpture, *Garden,* is scattered over the gallery floor and climbs gingerly onto an adjacent wall. *Garden* could represent either natural elements like rocks, fungi, and mushrooms or forms more related to the body such as moles, tumours, or genitals. Their diminutive proportions and delicate hues recall Bourgeois' recumbent figures which she believes show "*a desire to give up, to sleep and be passive, to retreat*" (Keller 27). *Garden*'s fleshy nodules huddle together for stability, but appear endangered with the slightest touch.

Figure 24. Joseph Anderson, *Sweet Tooth* exhibition installation view.

The physical proximity in the gallery of *Garden* to the painting *Large Sweet Tooth* is deliberate. Both sculpture and painting emphasize skin imperfections and aching cavities. In this sculpture, as in Kelley's, the small scale encourages the viewer to "project" onto the objects a desire to rescue, to hold or to banish.

Figure 25. Joseph Anderson, *Garden* (detail), 2008 sewn and stuffed second-hand fabric.

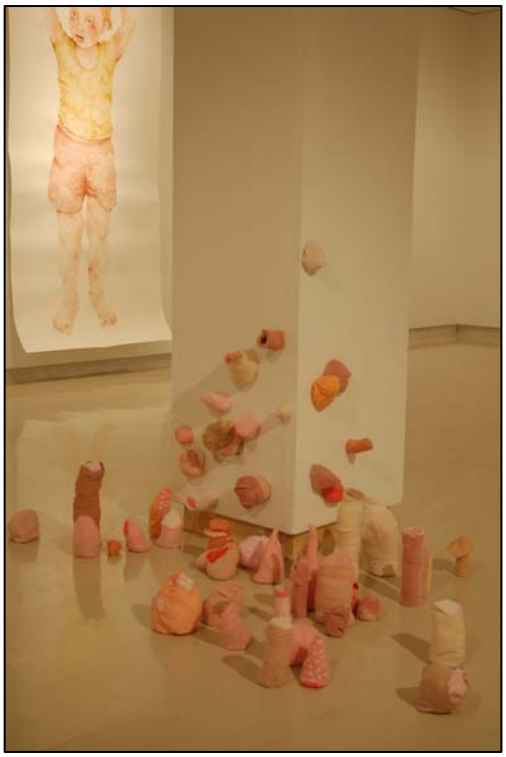

Figure 26. Joseph Anderson, *Garden* (detail), 2008, sewn and stuffed second-hand fabric.

Figure 27. Joseph Anderson, *Garden* (detail), 2008, sewn and stuffed second-hand fabric, dimensions variable

Figure 28. Joseph Anderson, *Sweet Tooth* exhibition installation view, left to right, *Sweetie Pie*, and *Choir*.

Where *Garden* was small, fragile and compliant, the large-scale sculpture, *Sweetie Pie,* affects an exaggerated pomp and solid presence. Strategically hidden behind a gallery wall, *Sweetie Pie* sulks in a corner of the gallery and extends rigid or vestigial protrusions over a weighty, pink exterior. The bloated scale of the sculpture demands attention and seems to suggest it might grow and expand. But despite the ludicrous scale, *Sweetie Pie's* frumpy demeanour and piecemeal construction is somewhat piteous.

I have positioned it in the gallery space near the *Large Child* paintings and it seems to befriend the awkward children portrayed here, weighted down patiently with immobile bulk. The lumpy figure is neither human, nor animal, nor vegetable, but has vague features which imply that it could be all three. It has cartoon-like extensions which suggest human body parts, like multiple phallic

appendages. These appear to indicate an erotic desire, although their actual function remains bewildering. Soft, gaping orifices also suggest connections to the human or natural world, but what is required to go into, or what may be extruded from these holes, is left for the viewer to decide. In my studio, the smaller, sculptural "dolls" were spontaneously handled by visitors. I hope *Sweetie Pie* stimulates a similar compulsion to caress, explore, and discover.

Figure 29. Joseph Anderson, *Sweetie Pie*, 2008, sewn and stuffed second-hand fabric, approx 70" x 85" x 90".

Figure 30. Joseph Anderson, *Sweetie Pie*, 2008, sewn and stuffed second-hand fabric, approx 70″ x 85″ x 90″.

Sleep Tight

In *Sweet Tooth*, my use of watercolour paintings and textile-based sculptures are intended to evoke fond childhood memories of reading and imaginative play, but also remind viewers of a time when the world felt immense and overpowering. The control one feels as an adult is unattainable to a child who experiences daily oppression by older siblings, parents, teachers or the moral doctrines in a scholastic or religious environment. Scales shifts in the exhibition are used to create tension by implying both the possession of power and loss of supremacy. My allusions to cautionary tales are meant to be unsettling in their didacticism, but also appealing in their common sense advice and solutions. *Sweet Tooth* investigates, both playfully and seriously, the complex, and sometimes troubling methods employed by authority figures to mould children and how the child reacts, opposes, and endures these commandments. In

creating these works, I aspire to reproduce a sense of child-like awe, as well as fear and caution. I invite the viewer to associate the images of children with their own memories of growing up, or the current development of a son or daughter. I am interested in crafting objects and painting imagery which evoke positive memories of playtime and frivolity, but to also unsettle the viewer with a nagging sense of unease. My exhibition, *Sweet Tooth*, offers an invitation to reflect and question the fate of "naughty" boys and girls.

Figure 31. Joseph Anderson, *Sweetie Pie* (detail), 2008, sewn and stuffed fabric.

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